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ERIE COUNTY COMPTROLLER

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ERIE COUNTY CONTINUES TO SHELL OUT BIG BUCKS IN OVERTIME TO SALARIED, POLITICAL APPOINTEES

Report finds managerial confidential employees continue receiving significant overtime pay in 2021, including almost \$70,000 for the Health Commissioner in all of 2021

(ERIE COUNTY, NY) – The Office of Erie County Comptroller completed a report updating the continuation of overtime pay for managerial confidential employees for the first quarter of 2021. The choice by the Poloncarz administration to give overtime pay to salaried, political appointees continued into the new calendar year, and is not the standard practice for counties across New York State.

According to the report, the highest paid Managerial Confidential employee to be paid COVID related overtime for the first ten weeks of 2021 is once again Dr. Gale Burstein who racked up 352 paid overtime hours over the course of ten weeks, raking in \$52,274. She also racked up 123 comp hours, 120 hours of which will likely be paid out as cash at the end of the year, or about \$12,000 deferred until the end of 2021.

While the report covered pay periods for only the first ten weeks of the year, auditors ran an additional report on Dr. Burstein's pay for all weeks for 2021, including the most recent pay period. It shows she received almost \$70,000 in overtime for all of 2021. The \$69,517.34 Dr. Burstein made in overtime so far for 2021 is more than what the Health Commissioner received in "straight pay:" \$63,621.09.

At this pace of receiving overtime, Dr. Burstein will more than double her annual base salary of \$209,305.

Dr. Burstein also volunteered to administer COVID vaccinations on weekends. Those weekend work hours contributed to her receiving time-and-a-half pay at the rate of more than \$140 per hour.

By comparison, New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) nurses administering COVID vaccines are being paid on average \$57.53 per overtime hour. This would mean the Health Commissioner is providing vaccinations at an overtime rate nearly three times what other qualified personnel are being paid to provide that same service.

"The overtime gravy train for salaried, political appointees continues to chug along, full steam ahead, fueled by the greed of patronage workers. The Health Commissioner made more in overtime the first few months of the year than most blue-collar families earn in one full year. Adding insult to injury, Dr. Burstein is raking in \$140 an hour to give COVID shots on weekends."

“At that rate, Erie County can hire three nurses to do the same job. Clearly getting as many people as possible a COVID vaccine is not the priority of the Poloncarz Administration. If it were, they would stop Dr. Burstein from billing taxpayers more than \$140 an hour in overtime to do so. Three union nurses could be paid the same to vaccinate a lot more people,” said Comptroller Mychajliw.

The new report also shows political appointees made more money in overtime for the first three months of 2021 than the total overtime earned for the years 2017, 2018 and 2019 combined.

The updated report reviewed overtime payments made to salaried, political appointees from January 22nd, 2021 (second pay period of the year) through April 2nd, 2021 (most recent pay period of the year).

In total \$147,868 in overtime from all three funds was paid to 28 Managerial Confidential employees for the first twelve weeks of 2021. While the Erie County Health Commissioner racked up the most individual overtime, the office with the highest total is the Office of Erie County Sheriff, earning \$67,591 in overtime for 13 employees, including stadium pay, for the first quarter of 2021. Without stadium pay, that total is \$23,587. It should be noted that stadium pay is reimbursed by the Buffalo Bills and Sabres.

The Undersheriff earned \$12,453 for 126 hours in overtime for that same period in 2021, or \$7,792 excluding stadium pay. Here are the top recipients of COVID overtime for the first quarter of 2021:

<u>Office</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Health	Commissioner of Health	352	\$52,274
Sheriff	Undersheriff	126	\$12,453 (\$7,792 without Stadium Pay)
Sheriff	Chief of Administration	130	\$10,923
Emergency Services and Homeland Security	Deputy Commissioner - Preparedness	146	\$8,990
Sheriff	Superintendent	93	\$8,371 (\$7,648 without Stadium Pay)
Emergency Services and Homeland Security	Deputy Commissioner	115	\$7,065
Sheriff	Chief of Special Services	72	\$5,982 (\$2,064 without Stadium Pay)
Sheriff	Chief Deputy Sheriff	71	\$5,909 (\$1,509 without Stadium Pay)
Sheriff	Chief Deputy - Civil	67	\$5,106 (\$949 without Stadium Pay)

“Taxpayers will be footing the bill for this outrageous, out of control overtime payments. In addition to earning this extra overtime now, future retiree pensions are based on the average of the three highest years of earning. Salaried employees should not get one penny of overtime to begin with. Political patronage workers know their salary when starting their government jobs. While hardworking families struggle, the politically connected laugh all the way to the bank,” concluded Comptroller Mychajliw.

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